

CLAMO Report

Center for Law and Military Operations (CLAMO), The Judge Advocate General's School

The Shifting Sands at NTC

This is the latest in a series of articles from judge advocates who are serving at the Army's combat training centers. The series offers judge advocate observer/controller insights into all five of the training centers and provides updates on the operations and issues arising there. The series will be supplemented by after action reports which highlight lessons learned. The series should not, however, be mistaken for instructional pieces or primers—for such information, contact CLAMO to receive practical guides and comprehensive after action reports.

It's 0430 on a Sunday morning and the Rolling Stones' *Satisfaction* is blasting from the observer/controller radio system on my HMMWV.¹ I awaken to the glow of a green chemlite hanging from my antenna and a spectacular view of the stars shining brightly in the darkness of the Mojave desert. As the Stones fade out, reveille blares and is followed by the two trivia questions for the day. I reach out of my coffin for my hand-held radio and answer, "five marines and one sailor" and "*Our American Cousin*." It is a battle day at the National Training Center (NTC), and the traditional Bronco Team wake-up call to the senior brigade trainer is followed by an FM radio brief which prepares my counterparts and me for the day ahead. Although I have traded in my desk for a HMMWV, I remain a judge advocate and have become part of an expanding group of judge advocates who have added observer/controller² to their resumes. I am a judge advocate observer/controller (O/C) at the NTC at Fort Irwin, California.

The NTC provides realistic joint and combined arms training to brigade-sized elements, with an emphasis on developing soldiers and commanders from mechanized and armored units. Formed in October 1981, the NTC was the Army's first combat training center (CTC) and was borne of the fear that the Vietnam conflict and its aftermath had left mechanized and armored forces unprepared to face a large Soviet conventional threat. Although the NTC started paying dividends soon after it was formed, the Army truly realized its value when commanders at all levels cited the time spent at the NTC as a contributing factor for the success of U.S. heavy forces in the Gulf War.

Training at the NTC features sophisticated live fires, use of "multiple integrated laser engagement system" (MILES),³ a dedicated opposing force (OPFOR),⁴ and full-time O/Cs, all of which are confined to the maneuver "box." The "box" is an area of the Mojave which is about the size of the State of Rhode Island where training units are isolated within geographical boundaries carefully set so that unit performance can be assessed and compared to doctrinal standards. It is barren, desolate, and unforgiving—perfect for the force-on-force, armored maneuver training that takes place here.

Considering the NTC's location and mission, it is not surprising that legal issues were not integrated into training at the NTC. Operation Desert Storm, however, proved that military operations, even in the mid- to high-intensity conflict spectrum and conducted in remote locations, give rise to legal issues. As a result of the "lessons learned" in the Gulf War and in response to real world events, recent command initiatives have rendered the "sterile" battlefield⁵ a thing of the past.

From 1981 through 1997, units which trained at the NTC fought an OPFOR from the fictitious People's Democratic Republic of Krasnovia, a Warsaw Pact nation schooled in traditional Soviet tactics. Elements of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (11th ACR) comprise the 32nd Guards Motorized Rifle Regiment (MRR). Configured in Warsaw Pact-fashion and employing Soviet doctrine, the MRR employ actual threat and visually modified equipment to simulate the Soviet-based conventional force.

The geo-political situation in the Tierra Del Diablo region now provides the background for the NTC "Road to War." While the Krasnovians remain the Soviet-style enemy, increasing tensions between the United States, Krasnovia, and the two other principal nations in the region, Pahrumpia and Mojavia, provide an environment complete with civilians on the battlefield and the potential for a wide range of legal issues.

In September 1997, I joined the operations group (OPSGRP) as the first judge advocate O/C. Although I am assigned to the Bronco Team, I work extensively with the Lizard Team, which develops the scenarios for each rotation. In addition to these

1. High Mobility Multi-purpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV or "hummer").
2. An observer/controller (O/C) is a subject matter expert and training analyst of the operations group. The O/Cs observe and assess individual and collective performance, teach and coach their training unit counterparts, and provide feedback through formal and informal after action reviews.
3. MILES gear allows troops and tanks to "shoot" and be "shot" using eye-safe lasers and alarms.
4. The OPFOR are the permanently positioned opposing force of superior numbers for training units at the NTC. The OPFOR are schooled in enemy doctrine, tactics, and strategy.
5. A "sterile battlefield" is a training scenario which is devoid of non-combat events.

two teams, the OPSGRP is comprised of the Cobra, Wolf, Dragon, Eagle, Goldminer, Raven, Scorpion, Sidewinder, Tarantula, and Vulture teams. These teams make up the armor, field artillery, live-fire, aviation, logistics, Air Force, mechanized infantry, engineer, light infantry, and audio/visual trainers, respectively. Together, these twelve teams consist of over 600 O/Cs, support personnel, and civilian contractors, and they have the primary training responsibility for all exercises/rotations conducted at the NTC.

The NTC hosts up to twelve training rotations per year for divisions, separate brigades, and armored cavalry regiments. Each rotation actually begins with the Leader Training Program (LTP), which has offered rotational unit commanders and their staffs an additional training opportunity since 1994. Conducted at 120 days prior to the start of the exercise, the LTP is designed around core training objectives and a menu of elective subject areas selected by the commander, based upon his own training assessment. It provides a full-up brigade and battalion staff—about seventy-five soldiers—a six-day active component training opportunity (three days for reserve component). The training unit is billeted at the LTP site at the NTC.

While most of the core training includes topics such as the tactical decision-making process and battle command, attendance at the LTP is one of the single most important events for a judge advocate who is supporting a training unit. Judge advocates will not only see first-hand how commanders and their staffs plan for missions, they also have an excellent opportunity to become integrated and synchronized with their commanders.

The process continues with the issuance of the alert order (about three months prior to the start of the exercise) and the home station trainup. Finally, the training unit arrives in the area of operations (AO) about seven days before the exercise. While the focus of the twenty-eight-day NTC rotation remains force-on-force maneuver training and live fires, the OPSGRP has incorporated contingency-based scenarios, especially during the Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration (RSOI) phase. The RSOI occurs during the first five days of the rotation, during which the training unit prepares to move from the assembly area (the “dust bowl”) into the “box.”

The contingency-based scenarios may give rise to a myriad of legal issues. A typical scenario is a Humanitarian Assistance operation in which a small, armored task force is dispatched to deliver humanitarian aid. Regular or irregular forces may ambush friendly forces, creating questions on the rules of engagement (ROE), the employment of weapons systems, or the laws applicable to providing assistance to the host nation.

The RSOI is followed by force-on-force and live-fire, which comprise the bulk of tactical operations. These two phases in the rotation provide the maximum opportunity for judge advocates, commanders, and soldiers to contend with tough legal issues. Everything that can happen on a modern battlefield occurs during these phases. Although some events are driven by scenario writers (civilians on the battlefield), much of a

judge advocate’s work will be based on a brigade’s performance during a battle. The number of fratricides to be investigated, civilians or protected places hit by indirect fires, and incidents involving enemy prisoners of war vary greatly between battles.

Like the O/Cs at the other training centers, I observe training unit commanders, staffs, and judge advocates as they wrestle with the legal issues arising during operations. At certain periods during and after rotations, all of the other O/Cs and I conduct after actions reviews (AARs)—we conduct more than 600 AARs during each twenty-eight-day rotation. I conduct some AARs informally: HMMWV-top discussions with training unit judge advocates. Others are much more formal in nature—comprehensive summaries which are developed for each battalion and company using multi-media presentations and which are intended to provide a base for home station training.

Though most legal AARs are done on a smaller scale, some legal issues are significant enough to make it into the formal AAR which is briefed to the entire brigade staff. This can be a very important development, as many participants may still be unaccustomed to the causes and effects which legal issues may have on operations and training. Whatever their form, AARs are the most important events at the NTC and, if done properly using introspection, they are tremendous learning experiences for all parties concerned.

As interesting as the legal training at the NTC is, the military training is what makes all the difference. To see an entire battalion of M1A1 tanks or Bradley fighting vehicles maneuvering around the desert at top speed—raising clouds of dust while moving, shooting, and communicating on the run—is an awe-some sight. Judge advocates and 71Ds obtain realistic live-fire training, but on a smaller scale. At the end of each rotation, a rotational judge advocate and each 71D will form a fire-team and participate in a raid upon a local village. It is here that legal personnel have the opportunity to fire an M16, M4, or squad automatic weapon (SAW) under live-fire conditions.

Though the desert is a great place to train, it would not be my first choice of places to live. It is hot during the daytime and cold at night—the average summer high temperature is over 100 degrees and the winter lows average 37 degrees. High winds seem to create a continuous cloud of blowing sand, from the low-lying valleys to the tops of the mountains. The elements demand preparation and underscore the importance of a well-equipped vehicle. As O/Cs, we drive completely open “hummers” that serve as our transportation and sleeping quarters. Like many O/Cs, I have built a “coffin” on the back of my “hummer.” By raising the top and pulling out the side panels, I have a dry and relatively dust-free sleeping area by simply placing a tarp over the open end. Moreover, I have plenty of storage areas below the sleeping compartment.

The NTC mission is to provide realistic, practical training for commanders, their staffs, and judge advocates. One of our current initiatives, therefore, is to determine how best to incor-

porate operational law issues and command and control issues into training scenarios. We are working closely with the scenario developers at plans and operations with a view toward formulating methods by which these issues may develop properly during training unit rotations, yet remain relevant to the NTC.

In addition to the training conducted in the “box,” we are establishing training programs for other judge advocates. We have established a ride-along program for installation judge advocates. The program allows judge advocates to go into the box overnight during a rotation, and it provides an orientation

to the NTC by teaching map reading, radio procedures, and the use of the global positioning system (GPS).⁶

The legal issues which have arisen in recent rotations have varied. Training units have dealt with host nation officials, civilians on the battlefield (including displaced civilians), enemy prisoners of war, ROE issues, status of forces agreement issues, fratricides, soldier misconduct, and other basic soldier support issues. The training environment at the NTC is as fluid and evolving as the unpredictable operations for which we are preparing—new and different issues are arising all the time.⁷ Major Kantwill and Captain Swansiger.

6. The GPS is often referred to as the PLGR or “plugger”—Precision Lightweight Global Position System Receiver.

7. For more information on legal issues at the NTC, see the NTC Homepage at <<http://www.Irwin.army.mil>> or <<http://www.Irwin.army.mil/opsgrpte.htm>>.